

Message Text

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USNMR SHAPE IMMEDIATE
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 03015

SECDEF FOR ISA/OSDR&E

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, MPOL, NATO, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN HAWK: PRESENT STATUS

REF: BRUSSELS 2416

SUMMARY. BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTY CONSID-
ERATION OF PARTICIPATION IN IMPROVED HAWK PROGRAM IS
CONTINUING AGAINST BACKGROUND OF BUDGET REVIEW AND MUCH
PUBLIC COMMENTARY. BELGIAN SOCIALISTS ARE SPLIT ON ISSUE.
NO FIRM DATE FOR BELGIAN CABINET DECISION HAS BEEN SET.
END SUMMARY.

1. PARLIAMENT AND THE TV, RADIO AND PRESS HERE DEVOTED
A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION TO THE HAWK ISSUE OVER THE LAST
WEEK. LITTLE IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE SERVED TO CHANGE
PUBLIC POSITIONS. WHEN PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS WAS
QUESTIONED IN PARLIAMENT BY LIBERAL PARTY DEPUTY DE CROO
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ON THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS ITS NATO OBLIGATIONS
AND ON WHAT THE ATTITUDE OF BELGIUM'S NATO PARTNERS)ULD
BE SHOULD BELGIUM FAIL TO LIVE UP TO ITS COMMITMENTS,
HE REPLIED BY REFERRING TO THE GOVERNMENT DECLARATION
(PARA 2 REFTEL) AND SAID THAT NO DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN
THAT RAN COUNTER TO BELGIUM'S OBLIGATIONS TO NATO.
DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS CRITICIZED THE SOCIALIST

ANTI-HAWK POSITION AS A CHALLENGE TO THE DEFENSE OF THE WEST. THE PRESIDENT OF THE FLEMISH SOCIALISTS, KAREL VAN MIERT, CHARACTERIZED VDB'S COMMENTS AS "DISPROPORTIONATE" AND SAID "WE HAVE MADE A CONSIDERABLE EFFORT TO MODERNIZE OUR MILITARY EQUIPMENT DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS. EVERYONE ADMITS IT, INCLUDING THE AMERICANS.

WHEN THE AMERICANS MAKE A 3PERCENT EFFORT THEY PROFIT FULLY FROM THE ECONOMIC FALLOUT. THAT IS NOT THE CASE FOR BELGIUM" THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRANCOPHONE SOCIALISTS, ANDRE COOLS, PUBLISHED A FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL IN THE FRANCOPHONE PARTY DAILY OPPOSING BELGIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE IMPROVED HAWK PROGRAM IN THE CONTEXT THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD FOCUS ON A CERTAIN NUMBER OF SOCIALIST PROPOSALS FOR REFORMING THE STRUCTURE OF THE BELGIAN ECONOMY. VICE PRIME MINISTER (AND SOCIALIST) LEON HUREZ PRESENTED A REPORT TO THE SOCIALIST PARTY BUREAU NOTING THAT THE BUDGET DEFICIT WOULD BE EVEN WORSE THAN PREDICTED, AND THAT THOUGH INFLATION HAD SLOWED THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF AN ECONOMIC UPTURN. AFTER FEB 13 DISCUSSION OF THAT REPORT, THE SOCIALIST CO-PRESIDENTS, VAN MIERT AND COOLS, TOLD INTERVIEWERS THEY REMAINED OPPOSED TO HAWK. EDITORIAL VIEWS REPORTED IN THE MEDIA COVERED THE FULL RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES FROM PRO TO ANTI-IMPROVED HAWK. THE ONLY NEW ELEMENT WAS A REPORT BY THE FLEMISH SOCIALIST DAILY VOLKSGAZET, THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO WAIT TO LEARN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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RESULTS OF A NATO DECISION, EXPECTED IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, WHICH MIGHT RESTRUCTURE THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT BELT INTO A SERIES OF DEFENDED POINTS SUCH AS ANTWERP, EVERE (NATO) AND CASTEAU (SHAPE). THERE WAS ALSO A FLURRY OF CONCERN, QUICKLY SETTLED BY THE PRIME MINISTER, AS THE RESULT OF A HET LAATSTE NIEUWS (MASS CIRCULATION LIBERAL) ARTICLE THAT BELGIUM WOULD HAVE TO PAY A "FINE" OF ONE MILLION BF PER DAY BECAUSE OF THE DELAY IN REACHING A DECISION. SUBSEQUENT ARTICLES ON HAWK IN HET LAATSTE NIEUWS WERE FACTUAL AND REFLECTED RAYTHEON INPUT.

2. A FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE HAS TOLD US THAT MUCH OF THE SOCIALIST CRITICISM OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS ON HAWK WAS REALLY AIMED AT HIS FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF THE DEFENSE MINISTRY IN GENERAL, AND THAT UNSPECIFIED CHANGES IN BELGIUM'S DEFENSE SPENDING WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE NECESSARY. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WE WERE TOLD, IS CONCERNED THAT THE PRESENT DEBATE MIGHT GET OUT OF HAND AND LEAD CERTAIN SOCIALIST AND FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIAN (TINDEMANS' OWN PARTY) ELEMENTS TO QUESTION BELGIUM'S DEFENSE OBLIGATIONS UNDER NATO.

3. A DEFENSE MINISTRY SOURCE TOLD US FEB 16 THAT MEETINGS OF THE MINISTERIAL AD HOC BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE (PARA 3 REFTEL) WERE CONTINUING. A DECISION ON HAWK WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE BY FEB 17, BUT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE BY FEB 25. THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT APPRECIATED RAYTHEON'S OFFER TO KEEP ITS PRICE OFFER UNCHANGED AT ITS OWN EXPENSE UNTIL FEB 17 AND IS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE ADDITIONAL COST
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FOR A FURTHER POSTPONEMENT. MEANWHILE THE PRIME MINISTER

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BRUSSELS 03015

WILL MEET FEB 16 WITH LEADERS OF HIS SARTY (CVP) WITH A VIEW TO HAVING THE CVP TAKE A POSITION ON IMPROVED HAWK (PARA 3, BRUSSELS 2325). CVP PRESIDENT, WILFRED MARTENS, HAS SO FAR REFUSED TO DO SO ON THE GROUNDS THAT HAWK WAS A GOVERNMENTAL, NOT POLITICAL PARTY, ISSUE. OUR SOURCE FURTHER TOLD US THAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY WAS ITSELF DIVIDED ON HAWK, WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAES, BOTH IN FAVOR OF BELGIAN PARTICIPATION, BUT CERTAIN YOUNGER SOCIALIST ELEMENTS OPPOSED. VANDEN BOEYNANTS PLANS TWO MORE PUBLIC APPEARANCES ON TV THIS COMING WEEKEND TO PRESS THE IMPROVED HAWK CASE. ASKED TO CHARACTERIZE THE PRESENT SITUATION, OUR DEFENSE MINISTRY SOURCE EXPRESSED "GUARDED OPTIMISM" ON THE FINAL OUTCOME. CHAMBERS

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